

Azerbaijan

Facts and Statistics

Location: Southwestern Asia, bordering the Caspian Sea, between Iran and Russia, with a small European portion north of the Caucasus range

Capital: Baku

Borders: Armenia (with Azerbaijan-proper) 566 km, Armenia (with Azerbaijan-Naxcivan exclave) 221 km, Georgia 322 km, Iran (with Azerbaijan-proper) 432 km, Iran (with Azerbaijan-Naxcivan exclave) 179 km, Russia 284 km, Turkey 9 km

Population: 7,911,974 (July 2005 est.)

Ethnic Makeup: Azeri 90.6%, Dagestani 2.2%, Russian 1.8%, Armenian 1.5%, other 3.9% (1999 census)

Religions: Muslim 93.4%, Russian Orthodox 2.5%, Armenian Orthodox 2.3%, other 1.8%

Language in Azerbaijan

The official language is Azerbaijani or "Azeri", a Turkic language. In 1994 it was estimated that some 82% of Azerbaijan's citizens speak Azerbaijani as their first language. In addition, 38% of Azerbaijanis speak Russian fluently to accommodate Russian domination of the economy and politics.

The Azerbaijani language is part of the 'Oghuz', or 'Western Turkic', group of Turkic languages, together with Anatolian Turkish (spoken in Turkey) and Turkmen (spoken in Turkmenistan). Dialectical differences between Azerbaijani and Anatolian Turkish have been attributed to Mongolian and Turkic influences. Despite these differences, Anatolian Turkish speakers and Azerbaijanis can often understand one another if they speak carefully. Spoken Azerbaijani includes several dialects. Since the nineteenth century, Russian loanwords (particularly technical terms) and grammatical and lexical structures have entered the Azerbaijani language in Russian-controlled Azerbaijan, as have Persian words in Iranian Azerbaijan. The resulting variants remain mutually intelligible, however.

Azeri Society & Culture

The Family

- o The family forms the basic social structure in Azerbaijan.
- o This goes back to many Azeris' history as rural dwellers where a clan (hoj) would share land and work together to form a tight circle.
- o A hoj would sometimes consist of up to 40 members.
- o Nowadays the family is a lot smaller - usually a married couple with children and possibly grandparents.
- o Families still work as an interdependent unit and expect to receive both financial and emotional support from others.
- o Gender roles are still fairly traditional in much of Azerbaijan with the man being the bread-winner and woman taking care of the domestic side of things.

Hierarchical Society

- o Azeris are still a very hierarchical society.
- o Culture, traditions, family and religious affiliation often take precedence over official laws.
- o When the government has trouble resolving an issue, the president often appeals to the "agh sakkal" (prominent and respected people) to help find a solution. "Agh sakkal" means "white beard".

Folklore and Superstition

o Azeri culture, due to its rural roots and culturally rich tapestry, has many superstitions. Examples include:

- A cat crossing your path means bad luck in business.
- Salt accidentally spilled means you are about to quarrel. Sprinkle sugar on the salt to counter this.
- Leaving scissors with opened blades brings misfortune and even death.
- If you meet a person with empty buckets, you are bound for misfortune.
- If you meet a person with bread and full bags, you will have good luck.
- Never hurry to a funeral ceremony.
- Do not cross the way the funeral train goes.
- If the first person you meet on your way to work is male, you will have good luck.
- Do not lend money or bread at night.
- Throwing a bowl of water in the wake of a person who sets off for a business trip or long journey brings the person luck and helps them to return home safe and sound.